



An Insight into the Ideological Principles of the BJP and its association with the RSS

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18954048>

Introduction:

The history of any party has the roots of its ideological principles. Thus, to explore the ideological principles of the Bharatiya Janata Party, it is important to go back to the history and the context in which BJP established itself as a distinct political party. The development of the ideological principles of a party or organization is a continuous process. Different persons have contributed their opinions and ideas towards the growth and progress of a party and the way it functions, which eventually become the ideology of the Party. Out of the different opinions and thoughts of different pioneering figures associated with the party, a party adheres to some thoughts which may direct the party in their political journey. This paper is an attempt to understand how the ideologies of Bharatiya Janata Party have evolved over the period of time. This paper also tries to understand the connection between BJP and RSS and how both the organizations influence each other while serving their respective goals.

The evolution of Bharatiya Janata Party's Ideology:

Prior to independence, Congress was the umbrella organization under which people from different backgrounds and interests were being united. As the time passes, different interest groups were also formed within the Congress based on their religious as well as caste or community identity. Muslim League was one of the first organizations, which came out of Congress based on their Muslim identity.

On the contrary, Hindu Mahasabha was an organization formed in 1906 to serve as a counterpart to the Muslim League. The Hindu Mahasabha became the first organization established with the explicit goal of promoting Hindu interests and an implicit concern about possible preferential treatment of minority groups, especially Muslims. They wanted to unify Indian Hindus beyond caste and community divisions. But Hinduism itself was hardly monolithic. A 1911 census stated that, "a quarter of the persons



classed as Hindus deny the supremacy of Brahmans, a quarter do not worship the great Hindu gods, a half do not regard cremation as obligatory, and two-fifths eat beef.”The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha believed it was their responsibility to create a community of people who identified themselves as Hindus first, rather than by caste, community, or linguistic affiliations. Critics expressed discontent with Congress-style nationalism in the Hindu Mahasabha (Venkatesh, 2021).

Congress was accused by Hindu Nationalists of violating the principles of secular nation building, a charge that they were to repeat throughout the post-independence period. Thus, they denounced Congress’ acceptance in the reservation of seats for Muslims. Later, Arya Samaj forecasted Hindu Nationalism in all these respects, to which it eventually gave birth. Provincial Hindu Sabhas (Hindu Councils) were formed by revivalist groups associated with the extremist tendency during 1907 and in 1915, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was founded as an umbrella organization for these organizations. The Mahasabha was given a formal organization in 1923 which was modeled after Congress and also started to become more expressly anti-Muslim and began to “show an interest in contesting elections as an independent force (Kanungo, 2002).

In 1925, K.B. Hedgewar, one of the members of Hindu Mahasabha, established the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the National Volunteer Organization, or RSS) to prohibit the Muslim aggression and also to protect the Hindus.

Hedgewar believed that India was a Hindu nation, but this nation was exploited at a time of weakness and conquered by successive Islamic dynasties (the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals) and finally the British Empire. He didn’t support the idea of passive resistance to the British Raj as introduced by M.K. Gandhi from 1917-1920. Hedgewar believed that the only way to throw off the yoke of colonial rule was through more aggressive activities (Venkatesh, 2021).

Hedgewar was very critical about the disorganized nature of the Hindu Society. He believed that due to the lack of solidarity among the Hindus, the Hindus became the victims of communal riots. Thus, he made an effort to start a strong organization which could protect the interest of the Hindus. He further placed some goals before the RSS. One important goal was to expand the influence of RSS in all aspects of life. To achieve those goals or objectives, he suggested to silently undertaking different works of the organization. He was also in favour of inculcating and planting the spirit of patriotism in the minds of the common people. He strongly believed that the prime goal of the RSS was to expand the presence and influence of Hindus in the public life of the country and not to capture the political power (Jaffrelot, 2019).



The works of V.D.Savarkar was his inspiration. Hedgewar also admired the works of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party in Italy, pointing their efficiency and seeming success in unifying a divided nation. Savarkar's political vision of Hinduism as the basis of nation building really inspired Hedgewar. He got also impressed by the working style of the Fascist parties in Europe. He tried to bring Savarkar's political vision of Hinduism and the working style of the Fascist parties together which in turn shaped his vision towards RSS. Savarkar asserted that British could only colonize India because of a lack of masculine strength among the Hindu people. He regarded the previous Islamic rulers as colonizers like the British. Muslim's interests in India, were about dominating Hindus, Savarkar stated. In particular, he believed that there has been a secret urge of the Muslims to transform India into a Muslim state which may result in a Civil war as soon as it confront the Hindustani state.

The Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were not at all happy with the partition. Savarkar claimed that from India the land had been 'taken away' and it was handed over to Muslims. Savarkar is also upset that the remaining land in the subcontinent was called 'India' rather than 'Hindustan' (land of Hindus). His aspiration for post-colonial India was a united Hindustan, which would include a Muslim minority that was granted no protection from majoritarianism or populism (Venkatesh, 2021).

By criticizing Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress's idea of Composite Indian nationalism, RSS and Savarkar advocated the Hindu nationalist ideology. After Hedgewar, it was M.S. Golwalkar who further developed RSS's Hindu nationalist ideology. From the ideas of Golwalkar and Hedgewar it can be understood that Hinduism stands for Hindu religion on the other hand Hindutva is a political ideology. The Hindutva ideology aspires to initiate Hindu nation in India. It has been observed that In India, Hindutva can be understood through two perspectives. While the first was propagated by Savarkar, the other one was initiated by Golwalkar. Although both the perspectives are inclined towards Hindutva but they have different methods and approach. Savarkar discussed and explained Hindutva in the year 1924 in his book *Essentials of Hindutva*. Savarkar believed that identity formation is the most important criteria for nationalism. According to him Hindu religion offers that identity which can enhance the feeling of nationalism in India (cited in Jaffrelot, 2019). He believed that Hindus were connected together through religious, linguistic and cultural sentiments despite having many differences. These sentiments have been formed over the centuries. It could only be possible because of very long assimilation process. Savarkar stated that while state belonged to political category, the nation was a cultural category. According to him although all the citizens of the country were part of the Indian state but non- Hindus might not be part of the nation (cited in Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).



He therefore identified the movement's objective as the unification of Hindus or Hindu Sangathan. When V.D Savarkar became President in 1937, Hindu Nationalism was more pronounced in the Mahasabha (Kanungo, 2002).

Hindutva: Who is a Hindu written by Savarkar in 1920s was the first attempt at endowing what he called the Hindu Rastra (the Hindu nation) with a clear cut identity, namely, Hindutva, a word coined by Savarkar. Declaring himself an atheist, Savarkar argued that religion was only one aspect of Hindu identity, and not even the most important. In fact, he draws his definition of Hindu identity out of western theories of the nation. In addition to religion, land and race, language is another pillar of Hindu identity. In this context, Savarkar refers to Sanskrit but also to Hindi: hence, the equation he finally established between Hindutva and "Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan". Therefore, according to Jaffrelot, Hindu nationalism appears for the first time as resulting from the superimposition of a religion, a culture, a language and a sacred territory- the perfect recipe for ethnic nationalism. Jaffrelot mentioned that according to Savarkar, as religious minorities are the outsiders, they must adhere to Hindutva culture, which is a national culture. In the private sphere, they may worship their gods and follow their rituals, but in the public domain, they must pay allegiance to Hindu symbols. Jaffrelot believes that Savarkar wrote Hindutva in reaction to the pan-Islamic mobilization of the Khilafat movement and therefore, most of his thoughts were derived from his deep rooted hostility to Islam and its followers (Jaffrelot, 2019).

On the contrary, Golwalkar believed that British rule was not an obstacle to achieving a Hindu nation; rather Muslims stood in the way along with Christians and communists.

Rather than challenging the British directly and putting the organization at risk, Golwalkar gave his importance on building a force that would be strong enough to create and defend a Hindu nation. Golwalkar ramped up the paramilitary aspect of RSS training activities in order to carry out his agenda. He reiterated the notion that Hindu men (particularly young men) had to be strong in order to defend their motherland from 'outsiders', as they had failed to do it in the past. He emphasized on the sacrifice of the forefathers of the Hindu people, who shed their blood in defense of the sanctity and integrity of the motherland. He asserted that only the Hindu has been living here as a child of this soil (Venkatesh, 2021).

Golwalkar was disappointed with the drafts of the Indian Constitution. He believed, it should have been written on the basis of ancient Hindu law rather than a 'foreign' approach based on human rights. As Savarkar believed, Golwalkar also blamed "hostility and murderous mood" of Muslim masses in India as the direct cause of the communal riots in 1947 (Venkatesh, 2021). The RSS' concept of Hindu nationalism was propagated by Golwalkar. Golwalkar emphasized on the superiority of Hindu



spiritualism. He asserted that as a perspective of change it is more superior than capitalism and communism (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

Soon after Independence, the RSS leaders realized that they couldn't remain out of politics. After the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, a ban was imposed on RSS (Jaffrelot, 2019). Golwalkar was charged of inciting communal violence. Thus, he was imprisoned for a year. After a long inquiry, the government allowed the RSS to start its activities again. Many conditions were placed before RSS which included the acceptance of the Indian Constitution and the renunciation of violence in agitations and demonstrations. As a result of this ban, the RSS leadership decided that they needed a political party that could participate in parliamentary democracy. Like this, the RSS themselves could continue propagating their ideology by flying under the radar without running the risk of being outlawed (Venkatesh, 2021).

Though reluctant, Golwalkar allowed the leaders to discuss the matter with Shyama Prasad Mookherjee who had been the president of Hindu Mahasabha. These discussions resulted in the creation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, on the eve of the first election. When the Jana Sangh took over from the RSS, Golwalkar seconded Deendayal Upadhyaya to the party and asked him to transform it into a genuine component of the nascent Sangh Parivar. He was asked to give Jana Sangh a doctrine of its own. Upadhyaya then developed his main doctrine, which is known as Integral Humanism (1965) – a text, which provided the bases of Jana Sangh's principles and policies in 1965. Main essence of the Integral Humanism is the emphasis on the importance of the society vis-à-vis the state. It is in line with The RSS's ideology which also emphasized on the importance of ground work at the local. Upadhyaya wanted to rehabilitate the old Varna system. He also stressed on the importance of decentralization of power to the village level (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Upadhyaya remained the Jana Sangh's general secretary from 1953 to 1967. In the 1970s, the RSS named its think-tank, the Deendayal Research Institute after Upadhyaya and he has been remained as a reference point for the official programme of Jana Sangh and later BJP. It is evident from the frequent apply of Integral Humanism in the election manifestos of these parties. Integral Humanism holds the view that Bharatiya culture is integrated. In the late 1960's Balraj Madhok became the president of the Jana Sangh. He asserted that the minorities should assimilate into a 'Hindu nation' and also according to him they must adopt Hindu culture and its values (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

Jana Sangh was always divided between two strategies, one moderate and the other one was more militant. The militant group was in favour of Hinduness in an aggressive form. They wanted to make Hindi as the national language and protecting of cows (by banning cow slaughter). Although, initially



Jana Sangh adopted the militant line, which was more in keeping with the RSS wishes but later in 1970s, Jana Sangh resigned itself to following a moderate line and merged with the Janata Party. In 1980, the former Jana Sangh leaders started a new party, the Bharatiya Janata Party which remained faithful to the moderate strategy. The RSS kept its distance from the BJP and made greater use of the VHP to re-ignite ethno-religious political activism. The more militant strategy found its main expression in the launching of the Ayodhya movement in the mid-1980's. That Ayodhya episode reinforced the champion of Hinduism image that the BJP had been trying to acquire among the majority community. By the mid-1990's, the BJP reverted to its moderate line. The moderate approach was blamed as responsible for the defeat of the NDA Government which was led by Vajpayee. The VHP leaders openly said that the Vajpayee government had betrayed the Hindus by not building the Rama Temple they longed for in Ayodhya (Jaffrelot, 2019).

The BJP and the RSS Connection:

Some politicians who originally belong to the RSS or Sangh Parivar starting from Balraj Madhok in 1960's and 1970's to BJP leaders today have complained about the RSS's interference in the BJP party politics. Ironically Hindu nationalists who believed that RSS should actually join politics failed to draw the RSS into politics until 1950s. Savarkar for instance, was not able to convince Hedgewar or Golwalkar to join Hindu Mahasabha. Golwalkar later changed his mind after independence under pressure from fellow swayamsevaks. Later, many advocated RSS to join hands in politics. One of them was K.R. Malkani who wrote in 1949, that Sangh must take part in politics to stop the un-Bharatiya and anti-Bharatiya policies of the Government. Golwalkar approved the views of Malkani and others who wanted to form a new party. Golwalkar met S.P. Mookerjee, the founder of Jana Sangh and settled for seconding senior swayamsevaks to the newly formed Jana Sangh including Deendayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok and Atal Bihari Bajpayee (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Balasaheb Deoras the successor of Golwalkar got much more involved in politics than any earlier sarsanghchalaks. He also introduced the specific brand of swayamsevaks known as 'activists'. As soon as RSS men took over the Jana Sangh, Hindu traditionalists were sidelined. The organization was restructured to such an extent that the pillars of the party apparatus sangathan mantris or organization secretaries for the district or state level came from the RSS. Its ultimate aim was the reform of society in the long run, and not the conquest of power since the state was not viewed as a prominent institution. Therefore, the Jana Sangh was very reluctant to enter into any alliance with any who are not fully in tune



with its ideology but only to capture power. The Jana Sangh like all nationalists was against linguistic states because they entertained regionalists or even sub-national identities (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020).

The instrumentalization of the Ayodhya issue and the related communal riots that polarized the electorates along religious lines helped the BJP make progress in election after election. During the Vajpayee Government it was observed that RSS and the VHP leaders questioned the hunger for power of the the BJP leaders. They also pointed out that BJP members compromised on their party principles to remain in office (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Shyama Prasad Mookerji, left the Nehru cabinet by protesting the betrayal of East Bengal Hindus. He belonged to the Hindu Mahasabha. Later, he established and became the president of Bharatiya Jana Sangh and an RSS leader, while Bhai Mahavir became the General Secretary (Kanungo, 2002).

The RSS and Jana Sangh were two entirely different and separate entities. One was cultural and the other political. The RSS Constitution even provided that nobody who held office in the organization could hold office in any political party. But, Swayamsevaks like Deendayal Upadhyaya, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Sundar Singh Bhandari, etc., advocated the joining of some RSS members into politics who have interest and ability. But they also stressed on the importance of the separation of politics from the RSS (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Advani in the concluding statement at the National executive meeting, stated that from time to time, the BJP leadership has been consulting the RSS functionaries. After such consultations, the party takes its own independent decisions. Some decisions may differ and some got alignment. However, lately an impression has gained ground that no political or organizational decision can be taken without the consent of RSS functionaries. This perception will do no good either to the RSS or BJP, but both the RSS and BJP must consciously exert to dispel this impression (ibid).

Conclusion:

Understanding the ideology of the BJP and its affiliation with the RSS is essential to comprehend the contemporary shift in India's socio-political landscape and its future trajectory. While the RSS provides the foundational Hindutva ideology and a disciplined grassroots network, the BJP acts as the primary vehicle for translating these principles into legislative action. As the country continues to evolve, the coordination between these two entities will remain a defining force in the nation's democratic and social discourse.



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